Opinion | Reza Pahlavi: The hour of Iran's freedom is at hand

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Reza Pahlavi February 28, 2026

Reza Pahlavi is a leader of the Iranian democratic opposition. He is the eldest son of Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, the last shah of Iran.

Early Saturday morning, U.S. and Israeli forces launched Operation Epic Fury against the regime in Iran. Its leader, Ali Khamenei, was killed, according to the U.S. and Israeli governments. In announcing the strikes, President Donald Trump laid out the grave threats the world's foremost sponsor of terrorism poses to the United States and its allies. He also addressed the Iranian people — the regime's longest-suffering victims — declaring that "the hour of your freedom is at hand."

Mr. President: Thank you. Those words gave the Iranian people strength, and I am certain they will meet this moment.

For nearly half a century, the Islamic Republic has not behaved as a state among states. Instead, it has operated as an expansionist revolutionary enterprise, subverting neighbors' sovereignty, fueling conflicts around the world, and pursuing nuclear weapons and the long-range missiles to deliver them.

The same apocalyptic regime that has oppressed my compatriots since 1979 has also institutionalized a policy of "Death to America." As President Trump rightly noted, the mullahs came to power by storming the U.S. Embassy in Tehran and holding Americans hostage for 444 days.

In the decades since, the regime has continued its campaign against the United States and the free world. The regime's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps is responsible for the deaths of a thousand or more Americans, including at least 603 U.S. service members through Iranian-supplied roadside bombs.

Beginning in his first term, President Trump responded with moral clarity and decisive action. He withdrew from the irresponsible nuclear deal with Iran, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action; imposed a sweeping maximum-pressure campaign; and designated the IRGC as a foreign terrorist organization. In 2020, he eliminated Qasem Soleimani, one of the regime's top generals and its chief terrorist.

Yet the Islamic Republic's most heinous crimes have been committed not abroad, but at home.

In January, as millions of Iranians took to the streets demanding freedom, the regime reportedly massacred more than 30,000 of them in just a matter of days. These are not the actions of a legitimate government but an occupying force. Indeed, the struggle in my country today is between occupation and liberation.

For years, my compatriots have called on the free world to stand with them. Now President Trump has answered their call. The Iranian people know they are not alone.

But even with U.S. and Israeli assistance, the final victory will be forged by the Iranian people. They are the boots on the ground. And now, as the regime's machinery of repression is dismantled, the balance of power is finally shifting, giving Iranians the chance to reclaim their destiny.

A free Iran will resume, after decades, its formerly warm ties with the United States. The rebirth of our nation will usher in an era of peace and prosperity, with energy reserves, an educated and entrepreneurial population, and geography that make it a natural hub of regional commerce.

Iran is not Iraq. We will not repeat the mistakes that followed that conflict. There will be no dissolution of institutions, no power vacuum, no chaos. That is precisely why my team of experts produced a transition plan called the Iran Prosperity Project.

This detailed road map for national recovery, including the first 100 days after the regime's collapse and the longer-term reconstruction and stabilization of our country, is backed by many business leaders around the world. The Post's David Ignatius has called the IPP "smarter than anything the U.S. government or Iraqi exiles produced before the 2003 invasion."

Iran's democratic opposition groups — monarchists and republicans, secular and religious minorities, leftists, liberals, and every ethnicity — are united on four foundational principles: Iran's territorial integrity; individual liberties and equality of all citizens; separation of religion and state; and the Iranian people's right to decide a democratic form of government.

Many Iranians, often despite facing bullets, have called on me to lead this transition. I am in awe of their courage, and I have answered their call. Our path forward will be transparent: a new constitution drafted and ratified by referendum, followed by free elections under international oversight. When Iranians vote, the transitional government dissolves.

A democratic Iran would transform the Middle East, turning one of the world's most persistent sources of upheaval into a pillar of regional stability. President Trump's historic Abraham Accords proved that peace between long-standing adversaries is possible when the right conditions exist. A free Iran would extend that breakthrough by immediately recognizing Israel and pursuing a broader regional peace framework linking Iran, Israel and our Arab neighbors in cooperation rather than conflict.

I suggest calling the agreement the Cyrus Accords, for Cyrus the Great, the benevolent ancient Persian ruler whom Thomas Jefferson cited as an inspiration. Such an agreement would replace the regime's ideology of hostility with a foundation for peace.

Unlike the Iranian regime's hatred for America, the people of Iran love America. They are grateful to this exceptional nation for giving my nation a chance at freedom. President Trump and many U.S. lawmakers have expressed solidarity with the Iranian people. For that support, we are deeply grateful.

As our liberation nears, we ask our American friends and the international community to continue standing by our side and to be prepared to recognize a legitimate transitional government when that moment arrives.

History rarely announces its turning points in advance. But moments do come when courage, leadership and solidarity can change the course of nations.

When the Iranian people succeed in reclaiming their freedom in the days ahead, President Trump will be remembered as a leader who stood with them when it mattered most.

God bless America. Long live Iran.